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"Road of knowledge, I am not small,
I am not big. A thing arrives, a thing with
a large head, a large mouth, a large foot.
I am the master of fertility; I am the master
of trees. Where does it come from? It comes
from the weariness of my seed. My master is
the vibration, out of which came the spirit,
the rain of which fertilizes."

772 773 contributed to the building of the visible world, especially engendering particles, moõ moõ, which entered into the composition of the earth, and a radiance, noro, used for the formation of the sky.

At the same time, the spirit let fall upon the earth (still in the process of formation) a heavy object in the form of a globule, kulu, which was later named pemba (1). Pemba, moving as a whirlwind to

1. From fẽ, thing and ba, big.

the four cardinal points (south, west, east, and north), received twelve of the elements issued from the spirit. Then, with the help of the particles that came out of fã, he modeled lumps and mounds which gave shape to the earth.

But in the course of rising, the spirit had thrown upwards that which was later called fãro (2). Faro, who was then no more than vibration,

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2. The Bambara use either faro or fãro, from fa (creation) or fã (knowledge) in the ancient language. This double etymology indicates the closeness in their minds between the concepts of creation and knowledge (see p. 17). The suffix ro expresses the idea of a whole, a totality. Another etymology has been suggested by S. de Ganay, in Notes sur la théodicée bambara, p. 196. "... the words Fané (the name of a family of blacksmiths), Faro, fan (force), fara (stone), and fari (body) all have the same origin. Faro is the secret name of stone." This etymology

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is interesting in that it accentuates the ties which, in the Sudan, bind the Faro of the Bambara and the Bozo, the Nommo of the Dogon, and the blacksmiths. See M. Griaule, Dieu d'eau (passim).

772 helped the spirit with ten of its elements and with the radiance from
773 fa to build the sky along an oriented trajectory. Faro first went to the west, then the south, the east, and the north, thus determining the celestial cardinal points.

/14/ The sky is distinct from empty space, kene, which separates it from the earth and which is the product of the "yereyereli's shedding after it had given birth to the spirit." The sky, composed of seven parts placed one above the other, was completed before the earth which itself is also made up of seven corresponding parts.

773 Although he had received the larger share of the elements disgorged by the spirit, Pemba could not finish his work alone. When the sky was completed, the spirit blessed Faro, precipitated him in the form of water along the trajectory followed by Pemba during his descent. This water fell drop by drop from the seventh part of the sky to the seventh part of the earth into which it streamed to gain knowledge of the earth's foundations. As Faro descended vertically, he left a globule in space which became the spirit of the air, Teliko (1); on earth, he

1. From teli, to go quickly.

deposited a particle which formed the spirit Soba (2). As he dripped

2. Literally: so, house, ba, big.

between the mounds which made up the earth, he saw that the latter was not completed, so he filled the empty pockets with water, thus forming the hidden springs of today.

Then life appeared on earth. Faro, impregnated by the vibration which was potentially masculine and feminine, gave birth to twin daughters on a deserted hillock (3). As soon as they appeared, the

[823] 3. Naked hillocks, walawala, and clearings are the scene of rituals concerning the twins.

## The Future Waters

773 The order of the universe prevails in space and time: the present order of things is but one phase thereof. When the "first running waters" covered the ground, Faro permitted only the primordial water to spread out; twelve waters remained hidden and they will rush forth and submerge the earth when he gives the order. The words they contain will be revealed and the "world to come" as thought out by yo will be realized.

Meanwhile, in the expectation of these "future waters," men must provide themselves with objects that will save them; the Bozo and some Bambara have canoes, shepherds have their gourds, spinners their spindles, and women their wooden stools (1). The coming /31/

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1. It is significant that kuru (canoe), kuruni (spindle), and kuruni (stool) come from the same root. The word kuru designates the original globule in which Pemba descended, and which later became the wood pembele in the shape of a trough; it also designates the case or ark used by the mythical blacksmith, bearer of the nutritive seeds. See p. 53, n. 1. The word kuru should be compared to koro which, in the Dogon language, has the general meaning of case, box, wooden receptacle, trough, and canoe, and which also designates, among these people, the vessel in which the blacksmith descended. See M. Griaule. L'Arche du monde chez les populations nigériennes, p. 117, n. 3.

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of the waters is represented by a drawing on these objects as well as on a number of other everyday tools (Fig. 3).

773 524 This drawing serves as the framework for a game, the sumangolo, which the Bambara of all ages and both sexes play in order to "contribute to the progress of the world."

This game bears the name of the ancestor Soumangolo who traveled throughout the universe to find out and reveal to men "the

193 are combined only by juxtaposition. To distinguish nuances of thought, the role of the word in the sentence, one has only the context and auxiliary particles to go by.

The distinction between the sexes is marked only by adding the words "male" or "female" to the root. The plural is formed by adding [15] to the substantive the suffix "w" and the necessary figure or the adverb "many."

Person, tense, and mood of the verbs are distinguished in like manner. The root remains invariable, and one expresses the accessory idea of person by personal pronouns, and the ideas of tense and mood with the aid of particles placed before or after the verbal root. The neutral or passive voice has but one special tense: the past, while the active voice includes three tenses, or more exactly, three aspects.

The first indicates that an action is not completed (this can be, then, a present or a future).

The second implies that the action is completed or that a state has been reached or still exists (this is approximately a past tense).

The third refers to an action which is to be completed in the present, past, or future under the influence of another action or another subject (this may render our subjunctive, our imperative, our optative, and, in general, the infinitive complement of a verb).

## C. Syntax

Bambara is extremely simple. Whether the clause be relative, interrogative, or conditional, the word order is not changed. This uniformity, this monotony of style, does not preclude eloquence, but it lies all in the action, the gesture, the tone of voice, the repeated use of onomatopoeia and of particles like "dé," "kwo," "ké."

## D. Vocabulary

192 This poverty of syntax is not accompanied by a poverty of vocabulary nor by an impossibility to express abstractions. The Bambara express very easily, and in a manner intelligible to all, ideas of belief, of hope, of ethics, of religion. The most striking characteristic of their vocabulary is the constant comparison of man

192 with nature; the same terms designate the parts of animals, plants, or even objects. These words serve as roots, as do the names of the four elements and of their properties. Two consequences follow:

[194] 1. A great ease in forming compound words; 2. The existence of a multiplicity of homonyms which we can distinguish only by the context, but which the natives distinguish by differences in tone or in vowel length.

## E. Numeration

802 In contrast to the Ouolof and Peul, who first count to five and then say "five and one," "five and two," etc., the Bambara have a different name for each number from one to ten (the word "five," doulou, [16] comes from "hand"; the word "ten", tan, from "to thank," to give both hands). After ten, they count "ten and one," "ten and two," up to 20, which is said as two tens, then three tens, four tens, etc., up to 80. The series begins again after 80 as it does in French after 100.

212 The Bambara have graphic signs to represent numbers. These signs have been studied by S. de Ganay (1).

1. S. de Ganay, "Graphie Bambara des nombres" [Bambara Number Writing]. [Ed., Journal de la Société de Africanistes, No. 2, 1950.]

[184] The graphic system varies with regions and sometimes from one village to another, but the most widespread method uses a series of vertical lines, each line representing a unit. To indicate that the number is doubled, the lines are placed inside a circle or crossed by a horizontal bar: |||| or ⊕ or ⧺ = four. To indicate an uneven number, a line is added under the horizontal bar.

But a line may indicate not only a unit, but a group of ten, and even a "hundred," keme (whose value is 80). To keep this clear, an arc is put over the line: ⌒ = 80.

212 801 Some systems represent ten by ten lines or by five barred lines under a single line. This method has a religious origin; it recalls that "creation is the issue of a unique principle symbolized

177 avoided the stroke of the sword or slavery, kept their faith in fetishes
181 intact, and shielded both themselves and their /68/ children from all religious propaganda -- for what was there to teach them, what could they be taught that they did not know already?

177 The terms from the Koran have become familiar to them in
192 present-day language. Since they do not come from them and express primarily a concept rather than the thing itself, they have been able to use them with complete freedom, without failing in the respect due to the superior beings, their lords and gods, whose names are never spoken in vain or in an unsuitable name. Nowadays the words have become so Bambara that the people do not even suspect that they are foreign to their language, and have no cause to be surprised at them. The Bambara make anything their own that they feel translates their thought precisely, without giving much attention to the original meaning of the word, which they often do not know. Having
[576] heard the Moslem repeatedly cry out bismilahi, they thought it in good taste to make this exclamation in the anecdotes and stories that they tell, and for two or three years this has been the super-polite expression in "smart" society for inviting a guest to enter a hut and squat on the mat. In twenty years this word bismilahi بسم الله will have no other meaning! Even though it means "in the name of God," you would be laughed at if you were heard to say that it is an Arabic word with quite another meaning, just as you would waste your time telling a Negro that the expression "fou moi le camp" /"get out of here," literally "give me the camp."/ is plain /French/ slang. When a slave escapes, does one not say, "a bi fou moi (1) le camp?"

1. a: "he," bi: "is," fou moi le camp; the whole expression: "to desert."

It is a widely used expression known by everyone and is teamed with this other: ze ma fo, about which I pondered for several days, seeking to find its meaning. Yet nothing could be simpler; it is "I don't give a rap." /From the French je m'en fous/.

776 177 798 out of the Bambara's need to soften their crime of idolatry and to preserve it by lending it extenuating circumstances. If the cradle of Islam is Mecca, if its superiority is derived from the holiness of that city, chosen and beloved by God (1), what can the Moslems want of

1. See what I said above on the subject of Mecca and Stamboul.

him, the Bambara, whose religion comes from this same much vaunted city? And if the God of Whom the Moslems preached to the Bambara has decreed everything (2), good and evil, if He is the Author of both

2. See the Koran: VI, v. 3 - 39; X, v. 99; XIV, v. 4; XVII, v. 32; XXXVI, v. 6, 7, 8, 9; LIII, v. 43, 44, 45 - 49; LXXVI, v. 29; LXXX, v. 29; etc.

good and evil and leads each person along the course that pleases Him to such a degree that he no longer has freedom of choice, why wish to take from them that which God has given them, that which comes to them from the holy city of Mecca!

776 796 782 [192] The Bambara term for the boli is gna. Their idea of them corresponds closely to the Arab concept of the chéitane شيطان, and in everyday language, they define them by a single word: sétané, "satan," even though this word is never on their lips in the sacrifices. In their nocturnal orgies and religious dances, the Negroes' notion of the genie to which they are sacrificing are shown in concrete form. And when, in their religious ceremonies in honor of the Komo, Kono, [178] Nama, etc., the spirit appears by the glow of little fires lit in the sacred woods, decked out in a cloak of feathers, his head hidden in a huge horned mask that has nothing human about it, one cannot help 776 796 thinking of the tales of old Breton grandmothers, told on a winter evening in the stables. The blasting of trumpets, bamboos, and koba 534 782 horns (3), the tinkling of /72/ the little bell, and the shouts of the

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this boli from the belt and hanging
it at the side along the thigh.

three most famous sorcerers, whose names -- Makono, Tjewolo, and Tjéba -- have been preserved, but whose origin is lost in the dark of ages, sacrificed to it by preference. This is the formula:

"Touafé Bla, Touafé Bla, the mountain of Touafé Bla is known, the trees of this mountain are known, I want to speak of the fire of its mountain. Touafé Bla, spare some houses (meaning: 'those of my friends') and go and kindle (your fire) in others (meaning: 'cast ruin and desolation among my enemies, among those who wish me ill'). Touafé Bla, favor me, and if I cannot see your fire, Touafé Bla, let me at least see the tip of its long column of smoke (meaning: 'you live in the fire; I cannot see your dwelling, but I can still know your power through the smoke of your fire, that is to say, /I shall know it/ if I am a witness of the misfortunes which you will cause to fall on my enemies and those whom I hate')." /73/

This formula shows us clearly that the boli, or gnâ, live in fire. The Negroes sacrificed to them before the arrival of the Moslems, and gave concrete form to their concept of the infernal spirit, just as they do today, by decking themselves out in a hideous horned mask and a cloak of feathers. Their blowing and shouting in the sacred woods on the days of great orgies have remained the same, and al-
[192] though they have taken the words sétané شَيْطَان and djahanéma جَهَنَّم from the Moslems, they have had the concept for a long time.

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Now then, as to the Bambaras' knowledge of the Supreme Being, God the Creator and Ruler, Lord of all, do they owe it to the Moslems?

The Bambara have too hierarchical a nature to need a master here! The youngest child is always the slave of the next older brother, who is the slave of an older one, and so the progression moves up invariably without ever changing, to the grey beard, the elder, the tjekoroba, a real fetish whom everyone obeys, whatever his stupidity, his narrowness of mind, or his lack of judgment.

In every family there is the same progression: the immediate lord of the children is their father, while he in turn bows before his

176 If on this earth the smallest of rulers, the least of potentates, is surrounded by servants and slaves, could the Creator be without them? If those who form the court of a king are superior to the gouatigi, or "family heads," to the dougoutigi, or "village heads," and to the kafotigi, or "heads of cantons," would those who form the celestial court be inferior to men, to genii, or to demons? The conclusion is perfectly natural; they would be superior to the latter, and to what will he /the Bambara/ compare them? Since they always in every way use themselves as a basis for comparison, they have only to think of themselves in order to remain logical in their conception of the world and to attribute to these beings the nature of their souls, their dousou, which they also call son. Is this not what they have done? When the Bambara define their idea of the soul and want to be understood, have they any other word than this very one, méléké, which they use to designate the angels? It is clear that they do not owe their concept [177] of heaven and the angels to the Moslems; they have appropriated from a foreign language a word which corresponded to a concept they already had, and that is all.

176 However, I am told that they have only one word to designate 177 the Divinity, the Only God, and that word is the Islamic term itself, 192 Alla. They have no other, and the first missionaries, doubtless 196 through ignorance of the pagans' hatred of the Moslems, adopted it, thus creating a hindrance to their ministry (1). Yes, Alla is the term

197 1. By translating as Alla both God and our concept of the Divinity, the first missionaries failed to establish the profound division which should exist between Catholicism and Islamism. The pagans regard the Catholic and the Moslem, as cousins, if not as brothers, and the word Alla is not irrelevant to this view. Because the Catholics believe in the Old Testament, they seem in the eyes of the Negro to border on Islamism, and the departure from it into Christianity

197 seems to them like membership in a sect derived directly from Islamism. The Moslems help with all their might to further belief in this nonsense. Therefore the missionaries should delete from their catechisms the word Alla for "God," as well as the ridiculous word mori for "priest," the word néma for "grace," etc., etc. -- in a word, all that is not Bambara.

176 177 192 196 they use in everyday language when they speak of God, but in the beginning did they not have another, and do they not still have one at present? /76/

I have always been surprised at the Negro's readiness to call a divine blessing by the name of its Author, and when in the winter he receives the blessing of blessings, the rain that makes plants sprout and the harvest grow, this is the way he expresses himself: "Alla bi fign, Alla bi na, Alla bi kouloukoulou, Alla bi yégé yégé, Alla do, etc., God darkens, God comes, God rumbles, God flashes, it is God," etc. These are purely metaphoric expressions, which mean: "The clouds gather; it will rain; the thunder rumbles; there are flashes of lightning, it is the rain."

I have found these metaphors on their lips also with exactly the same meaning but this time in Bambara words: "Sa bi fign, sa bi na, sa bi kouloukoulou, sa bi yégé yégé, sa do," the meaning is likewise: "The clouds gather; it will rain; the thunder rumbles; there are flashes of lightning; it is the rain." The word sa is strictly Bambara and so cannot reasonably be regarded as more recent than the Arab word; the Negroes therefore had it before they knew the word Alla. The word did not mean "cloud," "thunder," "lightning," or "rain," and there is every reason to believe that there was a time when it awakened in their minds a concept identical with that which the word Alla awakens in them at present, and that this word Alla from a foreign language is only used to express a concept long held by them.

776 196 God, their supreme deity? They are not that stupid, the snake is an ordinary taboo, the dwelling place of a genie, an infernal spirit or a demon, and nothing more.

The word sa in the sentences sa bi fign, sa do, etc. ("the clouds gather, it is the rain," etc.), has a broad and vague meaning, indicating everything that is on high, everything that is above us. Was this word in the past the very name of the Divinity, as the word Alla is for many today? I do not think so. The word sa was the veiled term used to speak of the Divinity and, like the word Alla, it originally expressed a concept or an idea, and not a "being" at all.

Since, according to Bambara ideas, God is a spirit dwelling above us with His court and angels, the expressions sa bi na, sa bi /78/ fign, sa bi kouloukoulou, sa-dji, etc., should be interpreted to mean: "Min bé sa-n-fé bi na, Min bé sa-n-fé bi fign, Min bé sa-n-fé bi kouloukoulou, Sa-n-fe ta dji -- He Who (the spirit which) is up above comes (will favor us with His blessing of rain); He Who is above darkens (gathers clouds); He Who is above rumbles (makes His voice heard); the water of Him Who is above."

776 196 ● 192 The supreme blessing that the Divinity, the Supreme Being, grants to human beings, is rain. As I shall demonstrate in a moment, the Bambara were unable to speak the name of their God and in their gratitude used a metaphor. Their fact that their metaphor, Alla bi na, Alla bi fign, is identical to the one in which the word sa appears, i.e., sa bi na, sa bi fign, etc., leads me to think, nay forces me to think, that in the beginning the word Alla expressed less an individual or a being than an idea or a concept. For I must confess that although some of our Bambara have the very ideas of the Moslems concerning God and the word Alla, there are more whose ideas on this subject remain confused, and for the majority God or Alla is nothing more than the arch of heaven (1), a covering which hides from us a "Spirit,"

1. To pagan Negroes, God is a spirit Who is everywhere, sees everything, but remains ens quantum. He dwells on high, is as large as the celestial vault, and because He hovers above us

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> sees everything. The old men explain this to you with an intensity that proves their good faith, and children recite the sayings of the old men with a frankness so naive that one cannot misunderstand it.

a Being endowed with reason and all powerful. The term is the translation of the word sa.

It is apparent that in the beginning the word Alla in no way meant a Being or an Individual; it simply expressed a concept, an idea already known, accepted and translated by the word sa, and the Bambara simply adopted a foreign word corresponding to their own concept.

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If to the Bambara the word Alla had meant the Divinity Himself, the Supreme Being, would they ever have dared to speak it, to make it their own? I cannot bring myself to believe that they would, among them the name of a powerful person, a religious chief, or venerated being is never spoken in vain or in an unsuitable manner. If some of their kings, among them /79/ N'golo, not to mention others, punished anyone caught speaking his /the royal/ name by fines and prison, cast them into slavery, and even beheaded them as guilty of the crime of lese majesty, what would they not have to fear from the Creator if they spoke His name in vain and inappropriately! Furthermore, it is a widespread custom to avoid speaking the name of one who is feared or venerated.

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No well-bred and self-respecting woman ever speaks the name of her husband. She speaks of him as né tigi ("my master"), so tigi ("the master of the house"). Most frequently she adorns him with a borrowed name, a bougna toua, or name of respect, and a polygamist has several such names, each wife giving him one of her own invention.

In well-brought-up families -- and most of them are (1) -- the

> 1. Our Bambara Negroes have great respect for the members of their families and are considerate of them;